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# Eschatology

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# Eschatology

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*Delbert R. Rose*

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### Introduction

Eschatology is the doctrine of “last things.” a study of those events, which conclude time and commence eternity. It is not an area of interest and inquiry peculiar to Christianity. For both philosophers and non-Christian religionists, ancient and modern, have asked: What is the individual’s final destiny? Where is the human race headed? and What is its final goal? Numerous answers to these inevitable questions have been offered through the centuries.

Biblical eschatology is perhaps best classified under two broad headings: (1) Personal or Individual Eschatology which includes Physical Death, the Immortality of the Soul, and the Intermediate State. (2) World or Cosmic Eschatology which studies the Return of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead; the Kingdom of God and its Consummation; the Kingdom of Satan and its Collapse; and the Eternal State of the Wicked or Hell (*Gehenna*), and of the Righteous or Heaven.

Throughout this study let it be remembered that from the standpoint of experience “the future is the sphere of the radically unknowable.” While men may speculate about the future and strive to shape it in every way possible, it is our Christian conviction that only supernatural, divine revelation can give us any certitudes concerning those unexplored tomorrows. However, affirms Emil Brunner, “...the whole content of the Christian faith is oriented toward the *telos*, the end.” And it is precisely at this point that “Christian faith is distinguished from all other religions in that in it faith and hope are inseparably linked, indeed almost inextricably one. Faith is the foundation of hope, hope is that which gives content to faith. But both faith and hope are rooted in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Brunner further declares, that “teaching concerning the last things... is not merely an appendix to Christian doctrine. Rather faith makes no affirmatives but such as ever imply the Christian hope of the future.”<sup>2</sup>

No century of mankind has been more aware of the future and man’s role in shaping it— making it happen through

political, social, technological, and biological engineering— than this generation. From the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954, to the Jesus Movement of the 1970's, and from the oft-quoted theologians of the era, such as Paul Tillich, to the aggressive cultists, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, eschatology has been in the foreground.<sup>3</sup> The whole "occult movement" now sweeping across the Western world is interested in the future both of particular persons and the world as a whole.

"Twenty years ago the study of predictive prophecy was seen as a dying endeavor," writes J. Barton Payne. But that did not dissuade the young scholar from starting his 754-page *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, published by Harper & Row in 1973.

Dr. Payne claims one of the major reasons for the rebirth of interest in Bible prophecy is reflected in biblical statistics. In his own critical research of the Old Testament he found that out of 23,210 verses in its thirty-nine books, 6,641 verses, or 28½% (plus) "involved predictive matters." Out of the New Testament's 7,914 verses, he found 21% (plus— or 1,711) of them contained predictive elements.<sup>4</sup>

As might be expected biblical prophecy focuses on Jesus Christ. In fact, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelations 19:10). From the proto evangel of Genesis 3:15 through "to the forecast of His eternal reign in Revelation 20-22," there are 191 distinct prophecies (not including types) "that have personal reference to Jesus." Payne believes he has located forecasts of Christ's second coming in twenty-nine of the Bible's sixty-six books.<sup>5</sup>

In his volume *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, Paul Tillich affirmed: "Biblical religion is eschatological. It thinks in terms of a complete transformation of the structure of the... earth, the renewal of the whole of reality. And this new reality is the goal toward which history runs, and with it the whole universe, in a unique, irreversible movement."<sup>6</sup>

To cope with the problems and pitfalls inherent in prophetic study the following have been my guidelines for this paper.

- 1) Let exegesis determine theology rather than use theology to determine exegesis.
- 2) Follow a time-tested hermeneutical principle: "Unless there is some reason intrinsic within the text itself which requires a symbolical interpretation, or unless there are other Scriptures which interpret a parallel prophecy in a symbolic sense, we are required to employ a natural, literal interpretation."<sup>7</sup>
- 3) Interpret difficult passages in the light of the more easily understood, and not vice versa.
- 4) Expect to find a "prophetic harmony" within the Word when it is rightly understood since the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, is the divine author of all Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16)
- 5) Use the fulfilled prophecies within the Scripture—record, and/or early Christian history— as models for what we can expect in the future, as prophecies continue to be fulfilled.
- 6) Do not insist on a crisis-fulfillment of that which God may choose to accomplish through a process, nor extend to a process what God has promised as a crisis-event. God did not always give the prophets and apostles the "time perspective" when they wrote prophetically. Therefore much of biblical prophecy is written without this "dimension of depth" (distance into the future) being included (compare Isaiah 61:1-3 with Luke 4:17-21)
- 7) Remember that some prophecies will only be understood as we approach the period of their actual fulfillment (see: Daniel 12:1-4).

- 8) Expect to find the principle of progressive revelation both relevant and necessary in grasping the eschatology of both Testaments.
- 9) As I turn to the body of this study, you should know that I am developing much of my personal credo concerning “last things” rather than merely reciting what others have believed and taught on the subject.<sup>8</sup>

## **Personal Eschatology**

### Death

Until very recently the talk of death among Americans except for poets and novelists was widely repressed. Now university graduate-level courses are offered, which include planning one’s funeral, filling out one’s death certificate, and a visit to a mortuary and a state morgue.<sup>9</sup>

One of the very popular books today is Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ *On Death and Dying*. Yale University’s eminent psychiatrist, Dr. Robert Jay Lifton, claims Death is the most important question of our time.”<sup>10</sup> In contemporary films, music, poetry, and fiction, death “has emerged as a dominant theme.”<sup>11</sup>

Why this growing preoccupation with death? Modern medicine and technological devices have lengthened life expectancy. Men are almost feverishly devising ways to extend life by means of heart and other organ transplants, drugs, and mechanical instruments. All these call attention to man’s attempt to prolong life— to evade death.

Yet in spite of this death is the most universally imminent of the various phases of eschatology. It is a mystery that cries out for interpretation. “If man is truly the crown of the divine handiwork,” asks E. F. Harrison, “why should he have a shorter existence than some forms of plant and animal life? ...Why, if man is made in the image of the eternal God, should he perish at all?”<sup>12</sup>

The biblical answer is that man has transgressed God's will and law, thereby bringing death as a penalty for his sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). As a term, death carries the idea of separation, whether used literally or figuratively. When man sinned he died in three senses of the word. He became dead in sin— cut off from spiritual life and fellowship with God (Luke 15:24, 32; Colossians 2:13). He became subject to physical death (Hebrews 9:27). In physical death the body and soul are separated. He became liable to "eternal death." Those who reject the provision for eternal life are destined for "the second death" which is separation from God and his new, righteous creation (Revelation 21:1-8).

In Scripture death is not treated as natural to man. It is instead something foreign and hostile to human life, expressing divine anger (Psalms 90:7, 11), a judgment (Romans 1:32), a curse (Galatians 3:13). It produces a disturbing dread and fear in men's hearts as they anticipate it (Hebrews 2:15).

Because of the connection between sin and death, Christ's redemptive mission entailed his own death in our behalf (1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 3:18). He tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9), and provisionally abolished it for all. Although Christians must die as do others— except those alive at Christ's second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52)— death for them has lost its sting because of Jesus' victory over it (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

Only gradually, however, is death to be abolished from God's universe. At the final consummation of history Death and Hades (the place to which the unrighteous dead have gone during human history) will be cast into the Lake of Fire, which is called "the second death." On the new earth "there shall be no more death" nor any of its age-old companions— pain, sorrow, and crying (Revelations 21:4). Because of the death Jesus died, Christians can now face that "last enemy" in victory and with positive gain (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54-57; Philippians 1:23), and say with the Psalmist, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalms 116:15).



### The Immortality of the Soul

Throughout history, in most if not all cultures, men have developed “symbols of transcendence” by which they connect their past in this world with their future in the next.

Unlike her neighbors, ancient Israel’s religion and literature did not develop a cult of the dead. While the “beyond” is clearly presupposed in the Old Testament, only a limited number of explicit statements on immortality can be found there. For Israel, believing in “God as a living and life-giving God (Numbers 14:21; Psalms 42:2; 1 Samuel 2:6) was doubtless the main ground for the belief in a life beyond death.”<sup>13</sup>

The accounts of God’s creation of man (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7; Job 33:4) of Enoch’s and Elijah’s translation (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11), and of King Saul’s attempt to communicate with the deceased Samuel, are a few of the evidences that the Israelites generally believed in survival after death (1 Samuel 28:4-25)

*Sheol*, the abode of the dead, while a place of obscurity (Job 10:20-22; Psalms 88:10-12), was not the end. It was a place from which men could be delivered (Psalms 16:10; 49:14ff; Job 19:25-27). Optimistically the Psalmist sings: “...God will redeem my soul from the power of *Sheol*; for he will receive me” (Psalms 49:15). Perceptive Israelites saw far more than merely the physical side of man’s nature.

Those passages in the OT that seem to speak of death as cessation, must be taken in the light of the entire context... Ecclesiastes is commonly thought to express unqualified pessimism about man’s future state... nevertheless, before the book ends, we find one of the strongest and plainest statements about man’s ultimate destiny: “and the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return unto God who gave it” (12:7).<sup>14</sup>

The Old Testament hope is climaxed by such prophecies as Hosea 13:14; Ezekiel 37:1-14; and Daniel 12:2, where bodily resurrection is also clearly in view. “Thy dead men shall live,” exclaimed Isaiah; “awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth the dead” (Isaiah 26:19).

What Old Testament believers could only dimly perceive, about either the soul’s existence between death and resurrection, or the resurrection body itself, Jesus brought to light through the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

The biblical view is that eventually the whole man, body, soul and/or spirit, will be immortalized (that is, rendered indestructible) even though the body undergoes death, dissolution, and then resurrection in order to reach its immortality. Only as man’s bodily and spiritual natures exist in harmonious union is man truly man (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7).

### The Intermediate State

Paul witnesses that those believers who die are, in their spirit-being present with the Lord, conscious of joys far better than those of earth (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23). Then at his Second Advent Christ will bring back the spirits of the departed saints and reunite them with their raised, glorified bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Oscar Cullmann has not so read the New Testament. He contends for two things: (1) That a soul is not immortal since Jesus stated in Matthew 10:28 that it can be killed. For him “soul” is more biblically expressed as the “inner man.” (2) That the “inner man” experiences an interim state of sleep between physical death and resurrection.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Robert H. Hoerber, chairman of the department of Greek and Latin at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, challenges Cullmann’s position. In my judgment, Dr. Hoerber shows conclusively that Cullmann has overgeneralized the Greek view, especially Plato’s, which he claims has influenced the historic Christian view of immortality of the soul. And,

further, he has failed to grapple adequately with the New Testament evidence that at death the soul— in its self-conscious, disembodied state— goes to be with Christ, in the presence of God, and that only the body slumbers in the earth between physical death and resurrection.

Moving from Ecclesiastes 12:7 to Luke 23:46, to Acts 7:59, to 1 Peter 3:19, and on to Revelation 6:9—along with the account of the rich man and Lazarus—Hoerber shows that the two Testaments unite in affirming that the immortality of the soul is not an idea foreign to the Scriptures as Cullmann has claimed.<sup>16</sup>

As presented in the New Testament the soul of the dying righteous enters Christ's heavenly presence (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; Luke 23:43)— a conscious state greatly preferable to life in this world (2 Corinthians 5:8; Psalms 16:11; Luke 16:19-21; John 17:24)— concerning which the heavenly voice declared: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them" (Revelation 14:13).

From Jesus' own words it seems amply clear that the unsaved soul enters a place of torment (Luke 16:23-24), and none of the New Testament writers gives witness contrary to this. Some have sought New Testament evidence, as in 1 Peter 3:18-20, for "a second chance," or a continued probation after death, leading to universal salvation; but evangelical scholarship, generally, has not been convinced by either the exegesis or the apologetics of these thinkers.<sup>17</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church sets out four distinct places in the intermediate state. The impenitent wicked go at once to hell; the fully righteous, such as martyrs, go immediately to heavenly blessedness; all other accountable ones are retained in Purgatory for a longer or shorter period, suffering the effects of purgatorial fire. While opinion varies, the prevailing view has been that baptized infants go directly to Heaven, but infants dying unbaptized (of both heathen and Christian parents) go to

a place called *Limbus Infantum*, to spend eternity in a dreamlike state where they neither feel pain nor heavenly bliss.<sup>18</sup>

For Catholicism Purgatory is “a place and state of temporal penal purification,” built directly upon the passage in 2 Maccabees 12:42-46 (an apocryphal book), and indirectly upon such Scriptures as Matthew 12:32, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; and Matthew 5:26.<sup>19</sup> Generally speaking, evangelical Protestants have vigorously rejected this doctrine of Purgatory which has no clear basis in the Scriptures, and because of its abuse by the Church of Rome. Some non-Catholics, however, have been tolerant of the Purgatory doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

## **World or Cosmic Eschatology**

### The Kingdom of God

We turn now to World or Cosmic Eschatology and consider first its most comprehensive theme— the Kingdom of God. Some biblical scholars view the Kingdom as the central unifying concept of the Bible’s sixty-six books. Dr. John Bright claims that “the bond that binds [the two Testaments] together is the dynamic concept of the rule of God.”<sup>21</sup>

The Kingdom of God, according to George E. Ladd, is “the sovereign rule of God, manifested in the person and work of Christ, creating a people over whom he reigns, and issuing in a realm or realms in which the power of his reign is realized.”<sup>22</sup> A person’s Kingdom-view, needless to say, largely determines his eschatology.

While different stages of the Divine Kingdom appeared between the times of Eden and John the Baptist, it was in Christ’s incarnation that God’s rule became personally and perfectly embodied. Two bold claims of Jesus support this view: “For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38, ASV); and “...he that sent me is with me... for I do always those things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29, ASV). But his own people rejected God’s rule through him. Therefore, claims Ladd, in the Second

Advent Jesus will bring his full messianic salvation to its proper consummation.<sup>23</sup>

The present Church Age, between the Advents, is another phase in God's Kingdom, under his larger cosmic rule. The Church is not co-extensive with the Kingdom, as some have claimed; neither is the Kingdom limited to the Church. For the time being— some would say “forever”— the Church supersedes Israel in God's plan for Kingdom extension (Matthew 21:43; Acts 1:6-8). That means God's Kingdom is *present now*— reigning “in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” in the hearts of full-fledged believers (Romans 14:17). An adequate biblical view of the Kingdom includes its present and its future phases. The Kingdom has been “inaugurated” on earth but it is not yet fully “realized.” In the age to come, beginning with Christ's Second Advent, what is now invisible, discernible only to the eyes of faith, will be made visible. In its future form the Kingdom will be both spiritual and literal, both heavenly and earthly, both a fulfillment within history (redeeming it) and the beginning of a transition to its eternal form beyond history.<sup>24</sup>

The visible kingdom era, often called the millennium, will be ushered in by Christ's descent from Heaven, coming as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 11:15-18, and 19:11-20:6). That heavenly invasion will mark the overthrow of the Antichrist's kingdom which will have become universally visible and vicious. Its totalitarian control of the politics, economics, and religion(s) of mankind will be overthrown by Christ's coming with power (Revelation 13:1-18:24; 19:17-21).

The eternal Kingdom Stage begins after the millennium ends, when Christ shall have put down all hostile rule, authority, and power. He will then deliver up to God the Father the Cosmic Kingdom-rule which he will have retrieved through his vast redemptive mission. At that point in the future the Son will subject himself to the Father that the latter may be all and in all (1 Corinthians 15:23-28). The eternal Kingdom Stage seems to coincide with God's everlasting Kingdom in the New Heaven and

the New Earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelations 21:1ff). The sure message of Scripture is that God's beneficent, uncontested, sovereign rule will in the future extend over all the cosmic reaches of his universe (2 Corinthians 15:25-28; Ephesians 1:20-23).<sup>25</sup>

### The Kingdom of Antichrist

"The final goal of Christianity is Jesus Christ," wrote Erich Sauer; but "the end of nominal Christendom is the Antichrist."<sup>26</sup> In his greatest of eschatological messages Jesus foretold the coming era of widespread lawlessness in the world and of apostasy in the Church (Matthew 24:10-14). Paul picked up the same theme in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4, 8, and emphasized the rise of "the Man of Sin" as a consequence of that apostasy. St. John's first two epistles warn of the Antichrist, another name for "the Man of Sin" (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7).

"The Antichrist is at once a person and a system... the leader and embodiment of a general human revolt" against God.<sup>27</sup> The Revelation, chapters 13-19, pictures his kingdom's rise to universal power and then its great collapse under judgment.

Having turned from God's true Messiah, humanity generally will look to Antichrist as "the messiah of the world, its cultural savior, its saving Head," and by him-- the pseudo-Christ— be deceived. The union of government, business, and religion under his rule will be "the summit of human revolt" against God and his Christ (Revelation 13:1-18; 17:1-18:24).

To gain this prestigious position Antichrist will doubtless be a leader, writes Erich Sauer, with "a surpassing personality, an inventive, unique organizer, 'a genius in statecraft, science, art, and social finesse...and endowed with the occult powers of the unseen world'" (2 Thessalonians 2:9).<sup>28</sup>

But the Lawless One and his kingdom will be utterly destroyed by the Lord Jesus at his coming (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:8; Revelation 19:15-21).

### The Second Advent

The limitations on this paper preclude treating numerous other matters of prophetic importance. But the foregoing view rests squarely upon a premillennial understanding of history. It sees Christ demonstrating within this temporal, spatial, material world that he is truly Lord of all.

New Testament writers employed four important words to designate our Lord's return. First, the word *parousia*, which basically means "presence," is used by Paul in I Corinthians 15:23; I Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23. Second, the term *epiphaneia*, meaning "appearance," which stresses "a visible manifestation" of that which has been out of view (1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). Third, *apokalupsis*, a term meaning the "revelation" of that which has been hidden. Peter uses this word (1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13) as well as Paul (2 Thessalonians 1:7). And, fourth, the word *erchomai*, meaning "to come" or "to arrive." While this term is used to refer to the coming of false christs (Matthew 24:5), it is especially used to point to Jesus' return (Matthew 24:30, 42, 44; 25:31).

The Second Advent (Hebrews 9:28), called by Paul "the blessed hope" for Christians (Titus 2:13), will inaugurate Christ's overthrow of the kingdom of evil and the establishment of the millennial stage of the Kingdom (Revelation 19:11-20:6).

The millennial glories of Christ's personal, visible reign from Jerusalem, the world capital of his government, include these marvels: a converted and restored Israel; a reconciled and converted gentilism (Isaiah 9:6-7; 2:1-4; 11:11-13; Micah 4:1-5; 5:2; Romans 11:1, 11-36); a world of nature freed from the bondage of the ancient curse (Genesis 3:13-19; Isaiah 11:6-10; Romans 8:15ff); and human life on this planet blessed with extraordinary measures of health, longevity, knowledge, material plenty, and tranquility (Isaiah 65:20; 30:23, 24; 41:18, 20; 43:20, 21; 55:13; Micah 4:1-4).<sup>29</sup>

Reigning with Christ over these earthly scenes will be the glorified Church, the Bridehood of Christ. In their glorified bodies, like unto his own, they will be free to function either in

the temporal-spatial world or beyond it, just as the Lord Jesus was and is able after his resurrection (John 20:24-21:14). And these will reign with him a thousand years upon earth (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:10-13; Revelation 20:4-6).

The foregoing interpretation cuts radically across the a-millennial position which rejects a literal, earthly, visible reign of Christ, holding that the thousand years of Revelation 20 are symbolical, having no literal fulfillment within history.

A post-millennial viewpoint holds that the Holy Spirit, working through the Church and its agencies, will usher in a reign of peace of considerable duration, possibly even a thousand years. After that “golden age” Christ appears to terminate time, arraign mankind for final judgment and bring in the eternal Kingdom of God. The post-millennial view negates the Bible’s emphasis upon the immanency of Christ’s Second Advent (Matt. 24:42-44).

Modern critical theologians, generally speaking, have not incorporated millennial or antichrist considerations in their respective eschatologies.<sup>30</sup> I can only list them here: the “idealist eschatology” of the older liberalism; the “consistent eschatology” of Albert Schweitzer; the “realized eschatology” of C. H. Dodd; the “realistic eschatology” (called by some *Heilsgeschichte* Eschatology) of Oscar Cullmann; the “symbolic eschatology” of Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr; the “existential eschatology” of Rudolf Bultmann; the “dialectical eschatology” of Barthianism; and “the theology of hope” of J. Holtmann.<sup>31</sup>

The whole tenor of New Testament prophecy at this point is that Christ’s appearance will be personal, sudden, visible, and glorious— just as was his ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11; Matthew 24:27; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). The purpose of his coming is to carry forward his total redemptive mission, moving history and the human race forward to their final destiny and the full establishment of God’s eternal reign.<sup>32</sup>

The *Parousia* itself will be an unannounced event— like a thief’s appearance in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4). The



*time* of his coming again has been called “earth’s best kept secret.” Since no man knows the day, nor the hour, he is thereby forbidden to become a “date-setter”— a craze which has brought disrepute upon legitimate prophetic studies in almost every generation (Mark 13:32, 21-23).

“Again and again throughout the Scriptures,” writes the noted British Methodist, A. Skevington Wood, “the approaching Return of...Christ is closely related to the message of sanctification...Nothing would do more to reinstate the doctrine of sanctifying grace amongst the churches of our day than a recovery of vital belief in the reality and significance of the Lord’s Return in power and judgment.”<sup>33</sup>

Each of the apostles linked in inseparable union, true hope, and holiness (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 3:11-14; 1 John 3:3). “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they... shall reign with him [Christ] a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6 ASV).

### The Last Judgment

Emil Brunner rightly affirms that “the conception of judgment flows necessarily from a recognition of the holiness of God. God is He who takes His Will in absolute seriousness.” And, Brunner continues, “If there is no last judgment it means that God does not take His own will seriously.”<sup>34</sup>

This cosmic event has a threefold thrust. First, at that assemblage God’s attributes and actions will come in majestic review before the “countless myriads of angels and men.” All his moral creatures will then confess— either gladly or grudgingly— “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou has judged thus... Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments” (Revelation 16:5,7; 19:2; Acts 17:30-31).<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, the full glory of Christ’s redemptive work will only then become manifest, when the redeemed fully see what they have been saved from as well as what they are being saved to! Thirdly, the Last Judgment will fulfill what both Christians

and pagans have inwardly felt must be-- a final day of giving account for one's deeds. And whoever is "aware of his freedom as bound by responsibility," wrote Brunner, "is aware at the same time of the fact of the last judgment. Without the conception of judgment all talk of responsibility is idle chatter."<sup>36</sup>

At that day God's ways with each person will be vindicated, and due rewards and/or punishments justly distributed, as they could not be in this ambiguous world. John Wesley believed each person's tempers, desires, thoughts, and heart-intentions, as well as transgressions, would be placed in open view along with all of each one's circumstances in this life. Shocking as this sounds the redeemed will not see these things mentioned to their disadvantage; for all this will only magnify the grace of God which has delivered them from such depths of sin and misery. We cannot but believe that God in that Judgment will take into full account all the hereditary and environmental factors in each person's life.<sup>37</sup>

"The supreme purpose of the general judgment is," wrote H. Orton Wiley, "not so much the discovery of character, as it is its manifestation."<sup>38</sup> At that "moment of truth," each one will be known for what he or she truly is, and not for what one has appeared to be. There will be a once-for-all disclosure that resistance to God reaps ruin, and that obedience to his will means life and peace, "and that man cannot dwell partly in the one and partly in the other."<sup>39</sup>

Let it be remembered that men are saved by faith, but they are rewarded according to their works, and these works spring out of the true nature of faith. As we are justified now by faith without works in the sense of merit, but by a faith that is always evidenced in works; so will it be in the final judgment, when the righteousness which is by faith will be vindicated by the works which flow from it."<sup>40</sup>

"...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27), which affirms judgment is as certain as death itself. In fact, even more so, for some will not

die, if alive when Jesus comes, but all will be judged. J. Jeremias reminds us, "The message of Jesus is not only the proclamation of salvation, but also the announcement of Judgment, a cry of warning, and a call to repentance... The number of parables in this category is nothing less than awe-inspiring."<sup>41</sup>

"This aspect of Jesus' teaching is unpalatable to modern man," writes Leon Morris. "So he simply rejects it. He has largely dismissed the thought of final judgment from his mind. He does not think of himself as accountable."<sup>42</sup>

While all must face judgment, genuine believers can do it with confidence and joy. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" asks Paul. "It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33). Hear the great affirmation from the Apostle John: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17:18).

The perfect wisdom and goodness of God shine forth, as in few other places, in the selection of the final Judge of all. "...the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:22-23). The Divine-human Son who sees and feels from the standpoint of both Deity and humanity is "the most proper person to judge" (Acts 10:42; 17:30-31). This divine arrangement means, "the final judgment will be a judgment of love. But ...the self-sacrificing love we see on Calvary is in itself the most damning judgment imaginable on the self-seeking life."<sup>43</sup>

### The Final State

The thought of eternal punishment for the unsaved is a terrifying one. Doubtless, for that reason, "there is no other doctrine that is clearly taught in Scripture which is so generally denied or ignored in our modern theological world."<sup>44</sup> Many have sided with the Norwegian bishop who publicly denied this teaching, declaring, "The doctrine of eternal punishment is not at home in a religion of love."<sup>45</sup>

However, four decades ago Nicolas Berdyaev, an exiled Russian philosopher, wrote, “It is remarkable how little people think about hell or trouble about it. This is the most striking evidence of human frivolity.”<sup>46</sup>

A serious examination of the Old Testament convinces me that biblical theologian, A. B. Davidson, was correct when saying that “so far as the Old Testament is concerned, a veil is drawn over the destiny of the wicked in death; they descend into *Sheol*; ...[but] there is no indication that their personality in *Sheol* ceases, or that they are annihilated...”<sup>47</sup>

But in turning to the New Testament we are startled to find that “the loving Savior has more to say about hell than any other individual in the Bible.” Consequently those who still believe in the eternal punishment for the wicked find their strongest support for it in the Gospels. Theologian W. T. G. Shedd claims “Jesus Christ is the Person who is responsible for the doctrine of Eternal Perdition.”<sup>48</sup>

For Jesus to preach of people going into hell (*Gehenna*) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44, 47-48), and to say to some, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels,” and closed his greatest judgment sermon with these words, “And they shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:41, 45) give ample basis for claiming that “the Christian doctrine of eternal punishment is Christ’s doctrine.”<sup>49</sup>

If Jesus knew better than he taught, then he is utterly unworthy to be our Savior; and, if he were only “a child of his times” and ignorantly taught an erroneous theology of “last things,” then he is incompetent to be the world’s Savior. But, supported by Peter, Paul, and John in their teachings, Jesus heads the line of biblical spokesmen, affirming that there are only two ultimate destinies for men: Hell (*Gehenna*) for the impenitent, and Heaven for the believing penitent.

The New Testament divides all of history into the present *aion* [“age”] and the *aion* which is

to come. The Greek language contains no other word which better describes the concept of endlessness. *Aionios* is used in the New Testament sixty-six times... The strongest evidence that the word *aionios* [rendered “eternal,” or “everlasting”] “is meant to teach the endlessness of the punishment of the wicked is in fact that the same word is used to describe the blessed life of the godly. In a number of passages they lie side by side... if *aionion* describes life which is endless, so must *aionion* describe endless punishment. Here the doctrine of heaven and hell stand or fall together.”<sup>50</sup>

Wesley also used this same argument in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Matthew 25:46).

It needs to be pointed out repeatedly that “the denial of hell has gone hand in hand with the denial of the infallibility of the Scriptures.”<sup>51</sup>

In general, the modern evangelical pulpit and press have been all too silent on this biblical message. Billy Graham has set us an example. Says he, “I am conscious... the subject of hell... is very unpopular, controversial, and misunderstood. In my campaigns across the country, however, I usually devote one evening to the discussion of this subject.”<sup>52</sup>

Arguments against everlasting punishment usually rest upon either or both of the following affirmations: God is too good, too merciful, for that teaching to be true; or, We are too good, too worthy, for that to happen to us. But neither of these claims has solid scriptural support, nor sound reasoning behind them as C. S. Lewis has effectively shown.<sup>53</sup>

Contemporary theologians usually settle for either (1) universalism—in which all will ultimately be saved, possibly even the devil—or (2) annihilation for the wicked, which amounts to “a conditional immortality.” But both of these undermine the abiding moral seriousness of the Bible.<sup>54</sup>

In their denial of the doctrine of eternal punishment many lauded theologians have strengthened the popular public appeal of some of the fastest growing heretical cults of our time— who likewise reject the doctrine of hell (*Gehenna*). These include Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Unity.

Since the Bible and spiritual reality must be interpreted by men, and no one person or group of people is infallible, would it not be supremely wise always to hold that interpretation (or theological position) which, if it should be seriously wrong in the End, we would be on the “eternally safe side” of things?

To illustrate: It would be far wiser to believe in an “eternal hell” for the wicked and tell men so— warning them to flee from the wrath to come— and then at the End learn there is no such place, than it would be to deny eternal punishment (thereby giving a deceptive comfort to the sinful and careless) and then be rudely awakened at the End— when it is too late to reverse one’s decision and influence— and find there is a “lake of fire” awaiting the rebels against God (Revelation 19:20; 20:10,14-15).

True Christianity is that pure religion which holds out hope for all men during Time, but which furnishes and feeds hope only for the redeemed after Time.

While Heaven is above and beyond us during Time, the Book of Revelation shows that in the New Creation of the future, Heaven’s glories will be transferred to the New Earth.<sup>55</sup> In that Eternal Age the redeemed of all generations, in their glorified bodies, will engage in activities as congenial to their redeemed natures as the unfallen Adam and Eve ever knew in their earthly Eden. Then, all that sin has brought into the old creation will have been eliminated. In the Holy City-come-to-earth will be the Throne of God and of the Lamb— and his servants will serve him. “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no night there [“No more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of

things has passed away”]. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:3-5; 21:4).

Within that holy, happy, harmonious City of God will be myriads of serving angels; and the redeemed from every race and nation and tribe and people will be fully devoted to the worship of the Triune God and to the well-being of each and every eternal inhabitant.

Language and thought both fail to capture the glories and joys of that Eternal Paradise.<sup>56</sup>

### Note

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Today's revived interest in prophecy can be found at all levels, from radio "Talk Shows" to the scholar's study, from the best sellers on book lists—such as Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth*—to the free literature distributed on street corners, from door to door, and by mail (usually offered in response to a religious program over TV or radio).

<sup>4</sup> J. Barton Payne, "The Bible Looks Ahead," *The Presbyterian Journal*, January 30, 1974, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> In this procedure I am following the suggestion of our Dean, Dr. Robert A. Traina.

<sup>9</sup> "University Offers Course in Death," *The Lexington Leader* [Kentucky], October 1, 1973; Kenneth L. Woodward, "How America Lives With Death," *Newsweek*, April 6, 1970, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> *Newsweek*, *Ibid.*; Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> *Newsweek*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "Death," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), p. 158; Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), pp. 21-63.



<sup>13</sup> William J. Martin, "Immortality," *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) p. 316.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>15</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Hoerber, "Immortality and Resurrection—A Reply to Oscar Cullmann," *The Christian News*, August 6, 1973, pp. 5-8; Harold B. Kuhn, "Immortality, Resurrection: Antithetical?" *Christianity Today*, June 22, 1973, p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur M. Climenhaga, "Universalism in Present Day Theology," unpublished lecture by a former Executive Director of the National Association of Evangelicals, Wheaton, Illinois.

<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1964), pp. 482-485; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), pp. 686-688.

<sup>19</sup> Ott, *Op. cit.*, pp. 482-485.

<sup>20</sup> H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), III, 240-242; James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), II, 321-322.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), xi.

<sup>22</sup> Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, p. 307.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*; Wiley, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-300.

<sup>25</sup> Erich Sauer, *The Triumph of the Crucified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 178-185; J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 547-548.

<sup>26</sup> Sauer, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-169; Erich Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 140-194.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Richardson, ed., *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 115. However, modern critical theologians occasionally attempt a reinterpretation of "Antichrist." A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), pp. 1-79.

<sup>31</sup> Moore, *ibid.*, *passim*; Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, *passim*; Rev. Fr. Gerald O'Collins, "The Principle and Theology of Hope," *Scottish Journal of Theology*. Vol. 21, No. 2 (June, 1968), 129-144.

<sup>32</sup> Wiley, *ibid.*, pp. 259-262.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Banks, ed., *The Right Way* (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1964), p. 75.

<sup>34</sup> Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 173, 179.

<sup>35</sup> While these Scriptures— Revelation 16:5, 7; 19:2— are not immediately connected with the Last Judgment, they are reflective of the responses of holy angels and the redeemed as they behold God's judgments upon the wicked.

<sup>36</sup> Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>37</sup> John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, n.d.), Vol. I, pp. 126-135; Wiley, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-354.

<sup>38</sup> Wiley, *ibid.*, pp. 350-351.

<sup>39</sup> Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>40</sup> Wiley, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 65.

<sup>42</sup> Morris, *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>44</sup> Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957), p. ix.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner's, 1937), p. 338.

<sup>47</sup> A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1904), p. 531.

<sup>48</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1888), pp. 675ff.

<sup>49</sup> Buis, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> Billy Graham, *Peace With God*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 73; Lon Woodrum, "The Great Anger," *United Evangelical Action*, Vol. 23, No. 11, January 1965, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: 11acmi11an, 1943), pp. 106-116.

<sup>54</sup> Buis, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-126.

<sup>55</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 108-110.

<sup>56</sup> Sauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-195; Bernard Ramm, *Them He Glorified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 62-136.

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